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NICHOLAS EVANS

The Calculation of Columba's Arrival in Britain in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the Pictish King-lists¹

ABSTRACT

Bede in his 'Ecclesiastical History' dated the arrival of St Columba in Britain and the foundation of the monastery of Iona to 565, two years after the 563 date derived from sources associated with Iona. This article analyses the different possibilities for how Bede obtained his date, arguing that he used a Pictish source, and places the claim in the 'Ecclesiastical History' that Iona was given to Columba by the Picts in the context of other evidence that Pictish over-kings in the decades before 730 were beginning to attempt to dominate Dál Riata. It also proposes that notes added to the *Series longior* Pictish king-list at Abernethy in the mid-ninth century display a strong Gaelic influence ultimately derived from a similar chronological source to that used by Bede. As a result Bede's calculation and the king-list notes provide evidence for Pictish scholarship and its cultural connections.

In book III chapter 4 of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*HE*), Bede wrote that St Columba arrived in Britain from Ireland in A.D. 565 in order to convert the Picts, and in return for this he was given Iona by those he had evangelised.² This episode was an aside from Bede's narrative account of the conversion of the Northumbrians, but it was significant to Bede in terms of his overall message, since the monks of Iona were later rewarded for their missionary activity among the Anglo-Saxons in 716 when the Northumbrian monk Ecgberht persuaded the Iona community to change their method of calculating Easter and their style of tonsure. Columba's arrival in Britain is dated to A.D. 565 and synchronised with other events in four calculations in *HE*, iii.4:

¹ Most of the research for this article was undertaken while I was a scholar at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, so I would like to thank the staff there, particularly Liam Breatnach for his seminars on *Córus Bésgnai*, in addition to Dauvit Broun, Alex Woolf, Simon Taylor, and those who made comments when I gave this as a paper at the 2006 Irish Medievalists Conference at Kilkenny. All errors are my own.

² Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* [*HE*], iii.4 (Bertram Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford 1969), 220–5).

Bede, *HE* iii.4: *Siquidem anno incarnationis dominicae quingentesimo sexagesimo quinto, quo tempore gubernaculum Romani imperii post Iustinianum Iustinus minor accepit, uenit de Hibernia presbyter et abbas habitu et uita monachi insignis, nomine Columba, Britanniam praedicaturus uerbum Dei prouinciis septentrionalium Pictorum... Venit autem Britanniam Columba regnante Pictis Bridio filio Meilochon rege potentissimo, nono anno regni eius, gentemque illam uerbo et exemplo ad fidem Christi conuertit; unde et praefatam insulam [i.e. Iona] ab eis in possessionem monasterii faciendi accepit...*³

Later in *HE*, iii.4, after stating that Columba and his successors on Iona used Easter tables of doubtful accuracy, Bede wrote that they used these tables for 150 years, up to A.D. 715, which would produce 565, the year of Columba's arrival, as the first year:

Bede, *HE*, iii.4: *Permansit autem huiusmodi obseruantia paschalis apud eos tempore non paucis, hoc est usque ad annum dominicae incarnationis DCCXV per annos CL.*⁴

In his summary chronicle at the end of the 'Ecclesiastical History' Bede also dates Columba's arrival to 565:

Bede, *HE*, v.24: *Anno DLXV Columba presbyter de Scottia uenit Britanniam ad docendos Pictos, et in insula Hii monasterium fecit.*⁵

Bede's date 565 for Columba's arrival differs from the 563 calculable from sources derived from Iona. Columba's death is dated to 9 June in 'The Martyrology of Óengus', written 797×808, and on a Sunday in Adomnán's 'Life of St Columba', written 697×705. In combination this would be correct for the year A.D. 597.⁶ Adomnán also stated

³ Bede, *HE*, iii.4 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 220–3), with the editors' translation altered in a few places: 'In the year of our Lord 565, when Justin the second took over the control of the Roman Empire after Justinian, there came from Ireland to Britain a priest and abbot named Columba, a true monk in life no less than habit; he came to Britain to preach the word of God to the kingdoms of the northern Picts... Columba came to Britain when Bridius the son of Meilochon, a most powerful king, was ruling, in the ninth year of his reign, and he [Columba] turned that people to the faith of Christ by his words and example, and so received the aforementioned island from them in order to establish a monastery there...'

⁴ Bede, *HE*, iii.4 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 224–5): 'This reckoning of Easter persisted among them for a very long time, no less than 150 years, up to the year of our Lord 715.'

⁵ Bede, *HE*, v.24 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 562–3): 'The priest Columba came from Ireland to Britain to teach the Picts and established a monastery on Iona.'

⁶ Columba's feast-day was 9 June according to *Féilire Óengusso* (Whitley Stokes (ed. and trans.), *Féilire Óengusso Céili Dé. The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London, 1905), 139), written 797×808. For this date-range, see Liam Breatnach, chapter III, 'Poets and Poetry', in Kim McCone and Katherine Simms (eds), *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies* (Maynooth, 1996), 65–77, at 74–5; and see Grosjean, 'Un fragment d'habitude anglo-saxon du VIIIe siècle, naguère conservé à Munich', *Analecta Bollandiana* 79 (1961) 328–31, for a discussion of the martyrological evidence. Adomnán,

that Columba had been in Britain for just over 34 years, which would probably date Columba's arrival in Britain to 563.⁷ Bede's alternative date of 565 has usually been explained as the result of calculation by Bede using one of his synchronisms; some scholars have argued that it was derived via the statement that the reckoning of Easter introduced by Columba was continued in Iona for 150 years, up to the year 715, while others have favoured the view that it was based on a synchronism with the ninth year of the Pictish king Bridei's reign.⁸ If the latter were the basis, then this would imply that Bede was basing his calculation on a Pictish source, since a similar calculation is found in Pictish king-lists. While the issue of how Bede produced his 565 date may seem to be a minor one, understanding how Bede obtained it and his related synchronisms not only enhances our understanding of his methods and sources, but also provides evidence for early Pictish historical writing and cultural connections in northern Britain.

Out of the four synchronisms, that linking the arrival of Columba to the first year of Justin II is least likely to have been the basis for the 565 date. This synchronism was probably introduced by Bede himself, since he made similar calculations elsewhere in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his earlier *Chronica Maiora* was structured on imperial reigns, including that of Justin II.⁹ Justin's succession is also noted in the Irish chronicles,

⁶ (Continued) *Vita Columbae*, iii.23 (A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Edinburgh, 1961; 2nd edn Oxford, 1991) [VC], 221, 224–6) does not give the exact date of his death, perhaps because this would have been controversial due to the Easter dispute (Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', in R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages. Essays Presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford, 1981), 1–42, at 5–6), but Adomnán did state that it was on a Sunday (see Richard Sharpe (trans.), *Adomnán of Iona. Life of St Columba*, 371–2, n.395). See Paul Grosjean, 'Notes d'hagiographie celtique', *Analecta Bollandiana* 78 (1960) 381–90, for evidence that Slébéne, abbot of Iona from 752–67, considered 563 to have been the year of Columba's arrival in Britain.

⁷ Adomnán, VC, iii.22 (Anderson and Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomnán's Life*, 216–17). The Clonmacnoise-group of Irish chronicles contain the information that Columba died in his 35th year in Britain, which probably agrees with Adomnán's account, but since this detail is not found in AU it could have been added to the Clonmacnoise-group chronicles in the tenth or eleventh centuries (W. Stokes (ed.), 'The Annals of Tigernach' Third Fragment, A.D. 489–766', *Revue Celtique* 17 (1896) 119–263, repr. in *The Annals of Tigernach*, vol.i (Felinfach, 1993), AT kl. 102.1). Since Stokes's edition is inaccurate and lacks editorial dates, the annals in AT will be denoted by the number of kalends they are from the beginning of the third fragment, which from 656 onwards means that the equivalent annal in AU is obtained by adding 400.; William M. Hennessy (ed. and trans.), *Chronicum Scotorum. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135; with a supplement containing the events from 1141 to 1150* (London, 1866) [CS], 595; Séan Mac Airt (ed. and trans.), *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B.503)* (Dublin, 1951) [AI], 597.1).

⁸ For the view that the 150 years of non-Dionysiac Easter reckoning was the basis, see Harrison, *The Framework of Anglo-Saxon History to 900* (Cambridge, 1976), 100 n.3; Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 6–10. For the opinion that the synchronism with the ninth year of King Bridei's reign was responsible, see Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1980), 117–18.

⁹ Bede, *De Temporum Ratione* (C. W. Jones (ed.), *De Temporum Ratione*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina CXXIIIB, Bedae Opera, Pars VI, Opera Didascalia,

but the imperial items in these texts were first included in the eighth or ninth centuries using Bede's *Chronica Maiora*.¹⁰ While it is possible that other scholars in Dál Riata or Pictland had access to similar sources to Bede's, the direct evidence for an imperial list in those regions is lacking.¹¹

On the face of it, Bede's statement that Columba remained in Britain for about thirty-two years is more likely to explain the 565 date, because 565 plus 32 produces 597, the year in which Columba's death took place, according to Iona sources. This contradicts the evidence of Adomnán's 'Life of St Columba', which states that Columba lived in Britain for just over 34 years, and of the Clonmacnoise-group of Irish annals, which gave him a thirty-five year stay. However, as A.A.M. Duncan proposed, it is likely that Bede obtained thirty-two years from a source which had thirty-five years, by a confusion of *u* with *ii*, a very common mistake of the period.¹² It is uncertain whether the Irish annals were the source of this information, since Columba's age and the length of his time on Iona are not stated in AU. This casts doubt on whether these details were present in the common source of AU and the Clonmacnoise group, the 'Chronicle of Ireland', which ended in 911. Since the detail, present in the Annals of Tigernach and *Chronicum Scotorum*, that Columba died on Pentecost would only have been correct according to the Dionysiac tables which began to be used on Iona in 716, this is likely to have been an addition made after 716.¹³ Nevertheless, even if the Irish annals were not the immediate source, the information in the Clonmacnoise-group item is likely to share a common source with Bede's statement on the period of Columba's stay in Britain.¹⁴

⁹ (*Continued*) 2 (Turnhout, 1977), 463–544). Other references to emperors after 431 are found in Bede, *HE*, i.13 for Emperor Theodosius II, *HE*, i.23 for Maurice, *HE*, i.34 for Phocas (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 44–7, 68–9, 116–17).

¹⁰ The item on Justin II (Seán Mac Airt, and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (eds and trans.), *The Annals of Ulster (To A.D. 1131) Part I Text and Translation* (Dublin, 1983) [AU] 566.3; AT kl 72.1; AI 562.3) is not found in the same annal as that for the arrival of St Columba in Britain (AU 563.4, AT kl 70.1, AI 563.1), although, since the latter item is not found in the first hand of AU, it could be a late addition. Also, the item for Justin II is likely to have been moved from AT kl 74 to AT kl 72 in the tenth or eleventh century (Nicholas John Evans, *The Textual Development of the Principal Irish Chronicles in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Glasgow, 2003), 64), but this still would not have meant that the succession item for Justin II was originally in the same annal as the notice of Columba's voyage to Britain.

¹¹ The Irish chronicles (probably when they were kept in a Patrician establishment) in the later eighth or ninth centuries did use a version of the sixth-century 'Chronicle of Marcellinus' which was from the same textual group as that used by Bede.

¹² Duncan, 'Bede, Iona and the Picts', 6–7.

¹³ Grosjean, 'Notes', 387, n.2.

¹⁴ Just before the statement that Columba lived in Britain for about thirty-two years, the detail that Columba was seventy-seven years old when he died is given by Bede. In their obituary items for Columba, AT kl 102.1 and CS 595.1 have *anno . . . etatis uero .lxx.viii*, 'truly in the seventy-seventh year of his life', while AU 595.1 has *anno etatis sue*

One major difficulty with a theory that Bede calculated 565 from 597 is that nowhere does Bede state that Columba died in 597. While it is striking that adding 32 to 565 still produces a plausible year for Columba's death, this could either be chance, or it could be that *xxxu* was intentionally altered to *xxxii* by Bede or his source to take into account other evidence which indicated that he arrived in Britain in 565.¹⁵ Whoever made the alteration, it is unlikely that they had access to Adomnán's 'Life of St Columba'; this would reduce the probability that such a person was closely associated with the Columban *paruchia*.¹⁶ It is perhaps significant that Bede uses the word *circiter*, 'about', before thirty-two years, because he is definite concerning his 565 date; if he had calculated 565 by subtracting 32 from 597 it would be expected that he would have been equally cautious regarding 565.¹⁷ It is possible that Bede's source did provide the 597 date but that Bede did not view it as important enough to include it in his 'Ecclesiastical History'. Such an argument is highly questionable and unlikely since Bede gave other details about his life, such as his age and the length of time he spent in Britain. Given all these arguments, it is very unlikely that Bede used 597 to calculate Columba's arrival.

Scholars have been more willing to argue that Bede obtained 565 through the synchronism found in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* that there were 150 years during which Easter was celebrated using the non-Dionysiac reckoning until 715. It has been argued by A.A.M. Duncan and Kenneth Harrison that Bede's source contained the information that Iona persisted in using the erroneous Easter calculation for 150 years.¹⁸ Bede then subtracted 150 from 715 (when, according to Duncan, he should have used 713) to get 565. However, it is more likely that Bede created the whole of this synchronism, rather than using a pre-existing 150-year figure. There are similar calculations elsewhere in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*; the arrival of St Augustine in England is stated to have been 'roughly 150 years after the coming of the English to Britain',¹⁹ the baptism of King Edwin of Northumbria is described

¹⁴ (*Continued*). *lxx.iii.*, 'in the seventy-sixth year of his life', and AI 597.1 has *anno . . . aetate autem .lxxvi.*, so in the Irish chronicles the common source could either have stated that Columba was in his seventy-sixth, or seventy-seventh year. Since AU and AI with *lxxvi* probably retain the 'Chronicle of Ireland' number, *lxxvii* in AT and CS is likely to be an alteration of the late-eleventh century or later. This makes it less likely that Bede was using the Irish chronicles as a source for his information on Columba, although there is a much stronger connection with the information in AT and CS.

¹⁵ Since mistakes involving *u* and *ii* were so common, it would have been reasonable for someone to assume that *xxxu* was actually a mistake for *xxxii*.

¹⁶ For a similar view based on different reasoning, see Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 6–7.

¹⁷ For Bede's other synchronisms, see below, 187–8.

¹⁸ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 10; Harrison, *The Framework*, 100 n.3.

¹⁹ Bede, *HE*, v.24 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 562–3): *Anno DXCVII. uenere Brittaniam praefati doctores; qui fuit annus plus minus annus CL aduentus Anglorum in Brittaniam*. The translation given above is my own.

as 'about 180 years after the coming of the English to Britain',²⁰ and, according to Bede, 731, when he was writing, was 'about 285 years after the coming of the English to Britain'.²¹ These calculations indicate that Bede was interested in linking significant events in ecclesiastical history and in his own time to another important development, the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. The fact that one was calculated to the date of the writing of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* indicates that these synchronisms were created by Bede himself.

A more closely related synchronism to that in iii.4 can be found in v.22, where it is mentioned that the monks of Iona accepted the orthodox ways of life 'about eighty years after they had sent Bishop Aedán to preach to the English'.²² This uses the same event, the conversion of Iona to the use of Dionysiac Easter tables and the coronal tonsure, as its base, but instead links the event to Áedán's mission to Northumbria. The two synchronisms are likely to have been written by one person, probably Bede, given his interest in the change of Easter reckoning in 716 and the establishment of Christianity in Northumbria, as well as his tendency to make calculations between events. Bede already knew that Iona changed its Easter calculation in 716, since he had already included this date in his *Chronica Maiora*, written in 725, so once he found out when Columba arrived in Britain, he could have made the calculation using 716.²³

This leaves the possibility that the 565 date was based on information that Columba arrived in Britain in the ninth year of the reign of Bridei *filius* Maelchon. It has been proposed by a number of scholars that this information came from a Pictish king-list or a related text.²⁴ Certainly,

²⁰ Bede, *HE*, ii.14 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 186–7): *ab aduentu uero Anglorum in Britanniam annus circiter CLXXX^{mus}*.

²¹ Part of Bede, *HE*, v.23 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 560–1): *Hic est inpraesentiarum uniuersae status Britanniae, anno aduentus Anglorum in Britanniam circiter ducentesimo octogesimo quinto, dominicae autem incarnationis anno DCCXXXI*.

²² Part of Bede, *HE*, v.22 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 554–5): *Susceperunt autem Hienses monachi docente Ecgberto ritus uiuendi catholicos sub abbate Duunchado, post annos circiter LXXX ex quo ad praedicationem gentis Anglorum Aidanum miserant antistitem*.

²³ Bede, *De Temporum Ratione*, §586 (Jones (ed.), *De Temporum Ratione*, 532–3). For this possibility, see Grosjean, 'Notes', 387, n.2. The fact that the other synchronisms indicate some ambiguity in the time-periods (because Bede was uncertain in which year the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain) shows that Bede was unlikely to have been so definite about the Iona synchronism unless he was sure about the date for Columba's arrival. This means that it is very unlikely that Bede fabricated the 565 date to produce a 150-year figure. However, he probably chose to frame his calculation as the period when Iona used the incorrect Easter calculation, rather than calculate to the year Easter reckoning was changed (in 716), because the round number 150 was preferable to 151 (see Charles W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England. Together with first English translations of The Oldest Life of Pope St. Gregory the Great by a monk of Whitby and The Life of St. Guthlac of Crowland by Felix* (Ithaca NY, 1968), 26–7, 42, for Bede's cautious attitude to dates and synchronisms, including a reluctance to change calculations and dates found in his sources).

²⁴ H. M. Chadwick, *Early Scotland. The Picts, the Scots and the Welsh of Southern Scotland* (Cambridge, 1949), 14; Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 7–9. Marjorie Anderson

it is apparent that Bede had some access to Pictish sources. Indicative of this is the fact that Bede states that Columba went to Britain to convert the Picts, and that as a result was given Iona by them.²⁵ This contradicts the accounts in Adomnán's 'Life of St Columba' and the Irish chronicles, which state that Iona was in Dál Riata, or that the Gaelic King Conall mac Comgaill consented to its foundation.²⁶ Adomnán, in his 'Life of St Columba', probably also downplayed the role of Columba as a missionary to the Picts, for, while Columba does convert some Picts to Christianity in the *Vita*, he is not credited with the conversion of the Pictish king Bridei or the Pictish people generally, unlike in Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' and the Pictish king-lists.²⁷ James Fraser has convincingly argued that Adomnán had access to two sources for his 'Life of St Columba', one derived from Cumméne's *Liber de uirtutibus sancti Columbae* written in the mid-seventh century, and another from a later Pictish account.²⁸ Fraser has highlighted that the episodes from the latter source, probably written by Adomnán, involved more spectacular miracles of power and the conversion of Picts.²⁹ However, even in these episodes the effect of the miracles for Christianity in Pictland is not as pronounced as in Bede's account.³⁰ This could indicate that Adomnán included the miracles from Pictish sources, but perhaps excluded any overt references to Columba as

²⁴ (Continued) (*Kings and Kingship*, 117–18) argued that Bede calculated Columba's arrival in 565 using a Pictish king-list, but left open the question of why Bede thought that Columba arrived in Bridei's ninth year. Anderson suggested that this may have come from Iona, rather than a Pictish tradition, perhaps being the year when Columba settled in Iona, rather than when he came to Britain. As Grosjean commented ('Notes', 386, n.2), such a scenario is improbable, especially since Bede explicitly states that Columba came to Britain in 565.

²⁵ Bede, *HE*, iii.3, iii.4, v.24 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 220, 222, 562). Chadwick, *Early Scotland*, 26–7; Hughes, *Early Christianity in Pictland* (Jarrow Lecture, 1970), 1–2; Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 9–10; Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe, and the Picts', *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–4) 183–98, at 188–90. For later references to Iona and elsewhere in Dál Riata being Pictish territory, see Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Iona in the kingdom of the Picts: a note', *IR* 55 (2004) 73–6.

²⁶ In Adomnán, *VC*, i.7 (Anderson and Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomnán's Life*), 30–1, Columba is described as being at the court of Conall soon after arriving in Britain, which could indicate that Adomnán thought that Conall had given Iona to Columba (Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona*, 267–8, n.79). It is possible that the reason why Adomnán did not explicitly state that the king of Dál Riata donated Iona was that he wanted to avoid offending the Picts. In AU 574.2, AT kl 82.1, CS 574 it is claimed that Conall gave Iona to Columba.

²⁷ For a similar view, see Hughes, *Early Christianity*, 11–12.

²⁸ Fraser, 'Adomnán', 184–7.

²⁹ See also Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the monastic familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988, repr. Dublin, 1996), 13–21, 24–6.

³⁰ Fraser, 'Adomnán', 187–8, has argued that Adomnán did not believe that Columba had converted King Bridei or the Picts in general. Nevertheless, his enthusiastic use of the miracles from his Pictish source (see *ibid.*, 192–3), which are set in a largely pagan Pictish setting, indicate that he did not reject altogether the view that the Picts had been pagan in the time of St Columba.

convertor of the Picts, founder of the Pictish Church, or as the recipient of Iona from the Pictish king.³¹

Acknowledging such claims would have had political implications in Dál Riata, since it would probably have meant accepting Pictish claims to overlordship. It may also have had potential implications for Iona, since, according to a late Middle Irish commentary (from the eleventh or twelfth century) on the law tract *Córus Bésgnai*, the kin of the original landowner of a monastery's land was second in line to the abbatial succession of a monastery, after the kin of the founding cleric.³² Therefore, in order to balance the competing geo-political interests of the Columban confederation, Adomnán included more recent Pictish miracle-tales to promote the cult of Columba among the Picts, but may have avoided the political messages implicit in the accounts found in the Pictish king-lists and Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History'. Adomnán may also not have included an explicit statement that Conall mac Comgaill gave Iona to Columba, to avoid offending the Picts, or because he did not want to recognise the rights of the original owner of the land to the abbatial succession of Iona.³³

While this could be viewed as a considerable over-interpretation, based on an argument from silence, there are indications that Pictish kings were attempting to extend their influence into Dál Riata earlier than the 730s, when a succession of campaigns led to the conquest of that region by the Pictish king Unuist son of Uurguist.³⁴ While Bede's statement that Columba was given Iona by the Picts, rather than by Conall mac Comgaill, is the strongest indication that kings of the Picts were claiming authority over Dál Riata before Unuist's campaigns, there

³¹ This does not necessarily mean that Bede and Adomnán both had access to a common written source, a Pictish *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as Fraser proposes (*ibid.*, 189–90).

³² D. A. Binchy (ed.), *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, 6 vols (Dublin, 1978), v. 1820, lines 8–30. See Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650–1000* (Maynooth, 1999), 227–8, and T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam: the patron-saint of an Irish church', in Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (eds), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), 267–90, especially 273–7. Etchingham also noted that the passage contains an early Middle Irish poem (composed no later than the late-ninth or tenth century) which displays the same order of claim to the succession as the commentary. Given the extremely fragmentary nature of the extracts from *Córus Bésgnai* commented on in this text, it is uncertain whether *Córus Bésgnai*, written before the mid-eighth century (Liam Breatnach, *A Companion to the Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (Dublin, 2005), 354), contained the same order by which the abbatial succession was decided.

³³ For Iona's abbatial succession, see Charles-Edwards, 'Érlam', 284–6.

³⁴ AU 734.7; AU 736.1, AT kl 236.1; AU 736.2; AU 741.10. Thomas Owen Clancy ('Philosopher-king: Nechtan mac Der-Ilei', *SHR* 83 (2004) 125–49) has proposed that the statement that Iona was given to Columba by the Picts could be explained by the Cenél Comgaill ancestry of the Pictish kings Bridei and Nechtan, sons of Der-Ilei, through their father Dargart, since Conall mac Comgaill, the patron according to the Irish chronicles, was also of Cenél Comgaill. This theory would, therefore, date Bede's source to after the accession of Bridei son of Der-Ilei to the Pictish throne in 696. However, since Bridei *filius* Maelchon, who was probably not from Cenél Comgaill, is the implied donor in Bede's account, this explanation is not particularly convincing, so an earlier date for the Pictish claim is possible.

are other hints that Pictish kings, while unable to dominate Dál Riata, were influential there before then.

In Adomnán's 'Life of St Columba' (ii.23) a Pictish noble called Tarain was committed to the protection of a noble on Islay by Columba, but this noble killed Tarain, and hence was punished with death by Columba.³⁵ As James Fraser has pointed out, this is probably an intentional parallel to events in the 690s, when a Pictish king called Taran was expelled from his kingship in 696 and then went to Ireland in 699.³⁶ It is likely that the message of Adomnán's tale was that, in the case of the expelled Pictish king Taran, Columba's protection should not be violated. If this interpretation is correct, then it indicates that it was regarded as possible that the Pictish king could pressurise or persuade a noble in Dál Riata to kill someone under the noble's protection. However, it does also suggest that Pictish power in Dál Riata was also limited, since the Iona confederacy was willing to harbour an enemy of the current Pictish king. In the case of the real Taran, it seems likely that, after being expelled, he went under the protection of Iona in Dál Riata, and that he then travelled to Ireland because Adomnán's worries about his safety were fully justified.³⁷

Other pieces of evidence could reflect Pictish influence in Dál Riata before the 730s. One of these is the fact that Iona changed its Easter calculation soon after the Picts did. Bede states that Iona did this soon after the Picts under Nechtan had made the use of Dionysiac Easter tables compulsory throughout the Pictish provinces.³⁸ Since there were Pictish monasteries in the Columban confederacy, this would have increased pressure on Iona to change its own Easter reckoning. As Julianna Grigg has argued, King Nechtan may have been attempting to increase his control over his own Church, but in addition to this he may also have been intending to extend his influence over Dál Riata itself, especially since the abbot of Iona also had authority over bishops according to Bede.³⁹ If the Iona confederacy changed its Easter reckoning this would make it difficult for the rest of Dál Riata not

³⁵ In Adomnán, *VC*, ii.23 (Anderson and Anderson (eds and trans.), *Adomnán's Life*, 126–9), Tarain is described as *de nobili Pictorum genere*.

³⁶ Fraser, 'Adomnán', 196–7. AU 697.1, AT kl 197.1; AU 699.3. For the argument that these items all came from 'The Chronicle of Ireland', see Evans, 'Irish chronicles as sources for the history of northern Britain, A.D. 660–800', *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 5 (2005) (forthcoming).

³⁷ The real threat, however, may not have come directly from his host, but could also have come from assassins or from the possibility that he could have been handed over to the Picts. Potential scenarios can be found in Bede, *HE*, ii.9, for the use of an assassin and *HE* ii.12, for Anglo-Saxon exiles (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 164–5, 176–81).

³⁸ Bede, *HE*, v.21, v.22 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 551–2), and see the Appendix below.

³⁹ Bede, *HE*, iii.4 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 222–5), but see James E. Fraser, 'Strangers on the Clyde: Cenél Comgaill, Clyde Rock and the bishops of Kingarth', *IR* 56 (2005) 102–20, for a warning against overstating Iona's dominance in Dál Riata; Julianna Grigg, 'Expulsion of the *Familia Iae* over the Spine of Britain by King Nechtán', in Pamela O'Neill (ed.), *Exile and Homecoming*.

to follow suit, if they had not already begun using Dionysiac tables, especially since some bishops in Dál Riata were controlled from Iona. According to the Irish chronicles, in 717 Nechtan expelled *familia Iae* across the *dorsum Britanniae* in 717.⁴⁰ Since this took place after Iona had changed its Easter reckoning it is unlikely to have been caused by the Easter controversy, although the Irish annals state that they changed their tonsure in Iona only in 718, after the expulsion of *familia Iae*.⁴¹ It is possible, then, that one of the reasons for the expulsion was an unwillingness on the part of the Iona community to recognise claims made by Nechtan regarding Dál Riata as well as Pictland.

Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, such an interpretation is relatively speculative, but the events of the 730s indicate that Pictish political interest in Dál Riata is likely to have begun before then.⁴² After the battles among the Picts in 728 and 729 involving a number of different leaders, the victor, Unuist son of Uurguist, continued to eliminate rivals and expand his influence. Initially the main foci of his interest seem to have been Talorgan son of Drostan, described as *rex Athfoitle* ('king of Atholl') in AU 739.7, AT kl 239.7, and the sons of Congus.⁴³ Atholl is a region on one of the major routes between the Picts and Dál Riata over the Highlands.⁴⁴ While it is uncertain where the sons of Congus were based, the fact that AU 734.5 (also AT kl 235.4) states that Talorgan son of Congus was handed over to the Picts indicates that he himself was not viewed by the Iona chronicler as a Pict, even though his name, Talorgan, was Pictish. It seems quite possible then, that Unuist was attempting to gain control of regions along the border with Dál Riata, although it is unclear whether they were considered to have been in Pictland or Dál Riata.

³⁹ (Continued) *Papers from the Fifth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies* (Sydney, 2005), 31–42, at 37–42). AT kl 218.6 (=718), CS 714.3 (=718).

⁴⁰ AU 716.4, AT kl 216.3 (=716); AU 717.4, AT kl 217.3 (=717), CS 713.2 (=717).

⁴¹ Julianna Grigg ('Expulsion', 41–2) has argued that the abbot of Iona and his followers, rather than all the Columban clergy in Pictland, may have been expelled while on a tour of Columban daughter-houses in Pictland. While this theory may be correct, such an action by the Pictish king would probably have had repercussions for the Columban clergy in Pictland, with other monks deciding to leave Pictland for Dál Riata in sympathy.

⁴² If Clancy ('Philosopher-king', 130–3) is correct that the father of Bridei and Nechtan, kings of the Picts from 697 to 724, was Dargart of Cenél Comgaill, then this interest in Dál Riata would be even more explicable.

⁴³ See William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 228–9, for the identification with Atholl. Thomas Clancy ('Philosopher-king', 133–7) has argued that Talorgan son of Drostan was the half-brother of Bridei and Nechtan sons of Der-Ilei and that he may have had a claim to the Pictish over-kingship, which would have provided another reason for King Unuist to eliminate him.

⁴⁴ It may already have been quite Gaelicised in culture (see Simon Taylor, 'Seventh-century Iona abbots in Scottish place-names', *IR* 48 (1997) 45–72, at 48–50, 60–1, 67–8, 70; reprinted in Taylor, 'Seventh-century Iona abbots in Scottish place-names', in Dauvit Broun and Thomas Owen Clancy (eds), *Spes Scotorum. Hope of Scots. Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999), 35–70, at 39, 40–3, 57–60, 68–9).

This may have brought him into conflict with the Cenél Loairn and Cenél nGabráin kindreds which dominated Dál Riata. The capture in 734 of Talorgan son of Drostan near Dunollie in Cenél Loairn territory indicates a connection between the border kindreds and the Dál Riata heartland (although it is not clear who captured him), and in the same year Unuist destroyed Dún Leithfinn after defeating Dúngal mac Selbaig of Cenél Loairn, forcing him to flee to Ireland.⁴⁵ Unuist was drawn into, or created the circumstances for, a major invasion of Dál Riata. Given the way that conflict developed from 728 to 736, it is possible we should not make a sharp distinction between the 'civil war' of 728–9 (or perhaps 724–9), the conflicts against Talorgan son of Congus and perhaps Talorgan son of Drostan, king of Atholl from 731 to 734 (perhaps 739), and the wars against Dál Riata from 733 to 741. In the context of the claims about Columba found in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Unuist son of Uurguist may have perceived all this as a single conflict designed to reconstruct Pictish control over all of Britain north of the Clyde-Forth line, including Dál Riata.⁴⁶ While before 731 such claims were unrealised, since there is no evidence for Pictish attacks on Dál Riata in the early eighth century, it is possible that Pictish kings were attempting to extend their influence into Dál Riata before then.⁴⁷ Even if this is an over-interpretation, it is highly unlikely that Iona would have stated that Columba went to Britain to convert the Picts and in return received Iona from them; therefore, for this, and the synchronism with the reign of Bridei *filius* Maelchon which accompanies it, Bede probably was reliant on a Pictish account.

A synchronism comparable to that in Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' is found in the *Series longior* version of the Pictish king-lists, where it states that Bridei *filius* Maelchon was baptised in the eighth year of his reign. The similarity with Bede's synchronism is striking, if not exact. Bede never actually indicated that Bridei was converted by Columba, but this was surely implied by the statements that he converted the northern Picts (who were ruled by Bridei) and was given Iona in return. It is likely

⁴⁵ AU 734.6; AU 734.7. For Dúngal, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 112, 184–5. For evidence of Cenél Loairn dominance (by Selbach, the father of Dúngal) of Dunollie see AU 701.8, AU 714.2.

⁴⁶ Such Pictish claims to overlordship over Dál Riata could potentially also underlie the view in Bede *HE*, i.1 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 18–19), that the Gaels took Dál Riata from the Picts, whereas the Picts did not have to conquer northern Britain from anyone. Since the Picts had prior ownership of Dál Riata, this could have provided support for a claim to dominance. However, the explanation of the word Dál Riata in this account is likely to come from a Gaelic source; therefore it is more likely that the source was from Dál Riata, and that such an interpretation probably was not intended. For the significance of this geographical fissure for ideas of ultimate secular authority, and Pictish ideas in particular, see Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2007), 51–61.

⁴⁷ However, in AU 686.2 on the battle of Dún Nechtain, a victory for Bridei *filius* Bile, king of Fortriu in Pictland, AU uniquely adds *et combusit Tula Aman Duin Ollaigh*. The first part of this is very difficult to interpret, but the second part is modern Dunollie in Dál Riata, although the political effects of this attack are unclear.

that the synchronism in the Pictish king-lists either derived from Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* or that they shared a common source. The year of Bridei's reign is different, but it should be noted that in the *Series longior* version of the Pictish king-list Bridei also has one year of joint-rule with the previous king, Galam son of Cennaleph, which would make it Bridei's ninth year:⁴⁸

*Galam Cennaleph uno/iiii anno/annis regnavit. Cum Brid(i)uo .i. anno.
Bridei filius Ma(i)lcon .xxx. annis regnavit. In octavo anno regni eius baptizatus
est a sancto Columba.*

A. A. M. Duncan has proposed that the synchronism between the reign of Bridei and Columba's arrival in Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' and the Pictish king-lists, as well as the item on the voyage of Columba to Britain in the Irish annals, were all based on marginal notes added to a Pictish Easter table.⁴⁹ Duncan argued that initially there were two items included in the Pictish Easter tables, one on the voyage of Columba in 563 and the other on the death of Bridei *filius* Maelchon in 584 (giving him a reign-length of 30 years). This information, as well as other Pictish royal obits, was then added by the Northumbrian monk Ecgberht into another set of Easter tables (or set of Irish annals), and included later in the 'Iona Chronicle'. The information in Ecgberht's Easter table, via a letter from Ecgberht, was the source for Bede's knowledge of Pictish history. Duncan also argued that at a later date the Pictish Easter table received the obit of Galam Cennaleph at 555, one year too late, making it only 29 years between this item and Bridei's obit, and resulting in the voyage of Columba being located in Bridei's eighth year, rather than his ninth. To explain these discrepancies, the note stating that Galam had a year of joint-rule with Bridei was added. This stage of the text was then used to create the Pictish king-lists.⁵⁰ Therefore, according to Duncan, the Pictish king-lists, Irish chronicles,

⁴⁸ For editions of the lists, see Anderson, *Kings*, 245–9, 261–89 and *Lebor Bretnach* §4, §§47–53 (A. G. Van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach. The Irish Version of the Historia Brittonum ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin, 1932), 5–6, 82–5). For the *Series longior* (SL) (subdivided into SL1, SL2, and SL3) and *Series breuior* (SB) designations, see Molly Miller, 'The disputed historical horizon of the Pictish king-lists', *SHR* 58 (1979) 1–34, at 1–3; Molly Miller, 'Matriline by treaty: the Pictish foundation-legend', in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick, D. Dumville (eds), *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1982), 133–61, at 159–61. Galam's reign-length is *uno* in SL1, *iiii* in SL2; SL1 has *Briduo* where SL2 has *Briduo* and SL1 has *Mailcon* where SL2 OE have *Melcon*, and SL2 HM *Maelcon*.

⁴⁹ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 7–10, and 36, where he argues that the Anglo-Saxon monk Ecgberht was the person responsible for compiling a text with items derived from the 'Iona Chronicle' and obits of Pictish kings.

⁵⁰ Duncan also argued that the king preceding Bridei, Galam Cennaleph, originally had a reign of two years, mis-transcribed as five, and that Galam's obit was placed a year too late, leading to the creation of the joint-reign of one year with Bridei (to maintain a 30-year reign for Bridei). However, none of the surviving Pictish king-lists give Galam a reign of two or five years; all have four, apart from SL1 which has *uno*, which was presumably a misreading of *iiii*. A similar variation is found for Cailtram *filius* Girom, who has *uno anno* in SL1 (and probably the ancestor of SL2), but *ui* in *Series breuior*, the

and Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' were all derived from a common source, the putative Pictish Easter Table. Also, since the Irish chronicles had 563 for the arrival of Columba, Duncan stated that it was not used by Bede to obtain 565. This supported his view that 565 was calculated by subtracting 150 from 715.⁵¹

This reconstruction is ingenious, because it explains much of our information about the Picts in a single hypothesis, but there are elements of it which are questionable. One problem is that the correspondence in contents between the Pictish king-lists and the Irish chronicles is not strong in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. While many of the kings in the Irish chronicles are found in the Pictish king-lists, their reign-lengths often are significantly different. The Pictish king-lists have a Nechtan *nepos* Uerp who is not present in the Irish chronicles, unless Nechtan son of Cano is the same person (which itself would indicate that a different source was used, because of the varying name-forms given).⁵² In addition, the Irish chronicles have an obituary notice for a *Cennalath* (or *Cendaeladh* in AT), king of the Picts, probably the Galam Cennaleph of the Pictish king-lists, but this is found at AU 580.3, AT kl 87.2 (equivalent to AU 580), only three or four annals before the obit of Bridei *filius* Maelchon (AU 584.3, AT kl 90.1, in the annal equivalent to AU 583), rather than in 555, as Duncan postulated once existed.⁵³ In placing Cennaleph's obit so late, the evidence of the Irish chronicles contradicts the Pictish king-lists, which

⁵⁰ (*Continued*) other version of the Pictish king-list. To argue that *SL1* has the original reading for Galam Cennaleph is to argue that *SL2* and *SB* are closer to each other than to *SL1*, and, therefore that the extra material found only in *SL* was systematically excluded from *SB*, which is extremely unlikely; *iii* should be considered the original reign-length for Galam Cennaleph.

⁵¹ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 10. Duncan (*ibid.*, 33–4) argued that the 150 year figure was obtained by Bede from the hypothesised letter written by Ecgbert on behalf of King Nechtan and sent to Abbot Ceolfrith.

⁵² AU 621.3, CS 621.2, AT kl 127.3

⁵³ Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 116–18, 231, for a comparison between the two groups of sources. Duncan, following a suggestion of T. F. O'Rahilly, proposed that the obit item in the annals for Bridei *filius* Maelchon in AT kl 90.1 (equivalent to AU 583) was a late addition because it had the Irish title *rig Cruithneach*, and that the item at AT kl 252.3 (=A.D. 752), *Cath Asreith in terra Circin inter Pictones inuicem in quo cecidit Bruidhi mac Maelchon*, was misplaced from A.D. 584 (Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 8, n. 1; Thomas F. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946), 508). In addition to the objections given by David Dumville (Grabowski and Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals*, 124–6) to O'Rahilly and Duncan's theory that the AT item in 752 was misplaced, it is probably significant that the vocabulary of this item is similar to other battle items of the eighth century, but highly unusual in the sixth century (see Evans, 'Irish chronicles as sources for the history of northern Britain, A.D. 660–800', *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 5 (2005) (forthcoming)). Also, the Gaelicisation of Latin titles is a common feature of AT, and to a lesser extent the Clonmacnooise-group as a whole. See for instance the replacement of *rex Hiberniae* (AU 642.1, CS 640.1, and 703.2 with *ri Érenn* in AT kl 137.2 and AT kl 203.2, CS 699.2); therefore *rig Cruithneach* in AT kl 90.1 is likely to be a late translation after A.D. 911 of *rex Pictorum*, and there is no need to posit that the whole item was a late addition. The 'Chronicle of Ireland' probably contained two obits of people called Bridei *filius* Maelchon: one simple obit for Bridei *filius* Maelchon (surviving in AU 584.3 and AT kl 90.1), the other a battle

conclude Galam's reign 29 or 30 years before the end of Bridei's rule. It is also not actually certain that the item for the voyage of Columba was present in the 'The Chronicle of Ireland' in 911, rather than being a later addition, since it is not found in the principal hand of the Annals of Ulster. However, if it was in 'The Chronicle of Ireland', and derived from 'The Iona Chronicle', it is unlikely that the Iona community would have needed to use a Pictish source for the date of their founder's arrival.⁵⁴ There is also no evidence that any of the Pictish items in the Irish chronicles included reign-lengths, a feature which would indicate a link between 'The Iona Chronicle' and the Pictish king-lists. Overall, the evidence for a common source for the Pictish king-lists and the Irish chronicles rests mainly on the appearance of many kings in common, but this could reflect a shared contemporary interest in the same kingship, rather than a textual link.⁵⁵ As a result there is no need to hypothesise Pictish Easter Tables as a common source for either the Irish chronicles or the Pictish king-lists, or posit the involvement of Ecgberht in the production of the Irish annals and Bede's synchronisation.

In addition, the theory of a set of Pictish Easter table annals and its development into a Pictish king-list should be re-examined. It is significant that a note with an exact synchronism on the conversion of King Bridei by Columba is only found in one textual group of the Pictish king-lists, *Series longior*, but not in the other group, *Series breuior*. The *Series breuior* lists contain a note stating that Columba converted Bridei *filius* Maelchon, but this is written in different vocabulary to the *Series longior* note, lacks the synchronism of the other textual group, and is likely to have been adapted from Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History'.⁵⁶ While the note in *Series breuior* could potentially have been in the common

⁵³ (*Continued*) recording the death of another person of the same name in 752 (surviving in AT kl 252.3).

⁵⁴ Our understanding of the dating of events in the Irish chronicles is not exact, so Duncan's view that Bede could not have obtained 565 from that text is not certain.

⁵⁵ Confirmatory evidence that there was a contemporary interest in Pictish kings from the sixth century is a somewhat mysterious item describing 'the flight before the son of Maelchon', in AU 558.2, duplicated in AU 560.2, AT kl 67.3, and CS 560.3, which probably refers to Bridei *filius* Maelchon. It was either an early contemporary item or it was derived from a different source from the obits of Bridei and Galam Cennaleph, but its existence indicates that the obits could have been early items in an 'Iona Chronicle'. This item, since it is located in the annals before the founding of Iona, could reflect information given to Columba and his companions on arrival, or to later Iona annalists, possibly from other Christians in Dál Riata. It is also very unusual; items involving the flight of people in the Irish chronicles tend to be battle items, but the phrase is usually at the end of the item using the verb *fugere*, rather than the noun *fuga* at the beginning of the item. This makes it possible that a flight without a battle taking place was implied, so those escaping could have been ecclesiastics (although the low number of items from the sixth century and the high probability that some were rewritten later makes it dangerous to make such inferences). It is unlikely that Columba was the only Christian active in Pictland in the sixth century, so it is possible that the flight was of ecclesiastics from Bridei *filius* Maelchon.

⁵⁶ MS. I (Anderson (ed.), *Kings and Kingship*, 280) has *Hunc conuertit Sanctus Columba*, and MS F (*ibid.*, 272) has *Hunc ad fidem conuertit S. Columba*. While Bede does not state that Columba converted Bridei, he does have (Bede, *HE*, iii.4, Colgrave and Mynors

source of the two textual groups of Pictish king-lists, written after 836, Bede cannot have used it since it lacks his specific synchronism.⁵⁷ The other note, found only in *Series longior*, is likely to have been added to the Pictish king-lists, at some point from 842/3 to 876, since the synchronism for the conversion of Bridei is similar to two others found only in *Series longior* in the reigns of Drust *filius* Erp and Necton Morbet/Morbrec *filius* Erip, as was noticed by Chadwick and Duncan:⁵⁸

Drust *filius* Erp: *nono decimo anno regni eius Patricius episcopus sanctus ad Hiberniam peruenit insulam.*⁵⁹

Necton Morbet/Morbrec *filius* Erip: *Tercio anno regni eius Darlugdach abbatissa Cille Dara de Hibernia exulat pro Christo ad Britanniam; secundo anno aduentus sui immolauit Nectonius Aburnethige deo et sanctae Brigite presente Darlugdach quae cantauit alleluia super istam hostiam.*⁶⁰

Bridei *filius* Maelchon: *In octauo anno regni eius baptizatus est a sancto Columba.*⁶¹

All three cases share the same royal dating formula, indicating that they were included at the same time. Also, the dating obtained by adding the king-list's reign-lengths for the arrivals of Patrick and Darlugdach, successor of Brigit, and Columba's conversion of Bridei is irreconcilable with the evidence of the Irish chronicles. If the arrival of Patrick is considered to be 432, then the foundation of Abernethy would have been in 521 according to *Series longior*, which is not too different from the evidence of the Irish chronicles, since Brigit's obituary notice is found in AU 524.2 and AU 526.1, AT kl 33.1, CS 523, and

⁵⁶ (Continued)(eds and trans.), 222) *gentemque illam uerbo et exemplo ad fidem Christi conuertit*, the last part of which could have been adapted for the Pictish king-lists.

⁵⁷ I intend to discuss in detail the development of the Pictish king-lists and the reasons for dating the archetype of all the king-lists to after 836 in a future monograph.

⁵⁸ Chadwick, *Early Scotland*, 9, 28; Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 9 n.1. For the date of the *Series longior* additions as 862×76, see Dauvit Broun, 'Alba. Pictish homeland or Irish offshoot?', in Pamela O'Neill (ed.), *Exile and Homecoming. Papers from the Fifth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies. University of Sydney, July 2004*, Sydney Series in Celtic Studies 8 (Sydney, 2005), 234–75, at 245–9. I have adopted the more cautious dating of 842/3×76, because of the (admittedly remote) possibility that not all of the kings in Gaelic orthography – Cinaed mac Alpín, Domnall mac Alpín, and Constantín mac Cinaeda – were included at the same time. The texts of the notes was derived by a comparison of the manuscripts edited in Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 246–8, 262; A. G. Van Hamel (ed.), *Lebor Bretnach. The Irish Version of the Historia Brittonum ascribed to Nennius* (Dublin, 1932), 82–7; and SL2E surviving in John Lynch's *Cambrensis Eversus*, 93–4; Matthew Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Cambrensis Eversus*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1848–51), ii. 90.

⁵⁹ 'In the nineteenth year of his reign the holy bishop Patrick came to the Hibernian island.'

⁶⁰ 'In the third year of his reign Darlugdach, abbess of Kildare, goes in exile for Christ from Ireland to Britain; in the second year of her arrival Nectonius granted Abernethy to God and Saint Brigit in the presence of Darlugdach, who sang alleluia over that offering.'

⁶¹ 'In the eighth year of his reign he was baptised by Saint Columba.'

Abbess Darlugdach died one year later according to the *Vita Prima* of St. Brigit.⁶² However, calculating from 521, Columba's conversion of Bridei would be located in one of A.D. 633, 636 or 639, which is much too late.⁶³ If reigns in the king-lists are counted back from the period of recorded Pictish kings, Columba's conversion of Bridei becomes placed in the late-sixth century, which is roughly in agreement with other sources on Columba. This means that the chronological difference is caused by the reigns preceding the Columba note. What exactly caused this chronological discrepancy is uncertain, but the lack of these notes or the year of joint rule between Galam Cennaleph and Bridei *filius* Maelchon (which is part of the same phase of textual alteration) in *Series breuior* indicates that the notes were additions to *Series longior* from another source, with a chronology containing about sixty fewer years between the Abernethy foundation and the Columba note.⁶⁴ Then, at a later stage, the notes were added to the *Series longior* Pictish king-list in the reign of the correct king without regard to their source's chronology.

A probable exception to this lack of concern for chronology is displayed in the dating of the synchronism for Columba. It is likely that the synchronism was related to Bede's calculation that Columba went to Britain in the ninth year of Bridei's reign. However, rather than suggesting that the form in the Pictish king-lists was the result

⁶² In the *Vita Prima* and *Vita Quarta* of St Brigit Darlugdach was abbess of Kildare for one year after the death of Brigit, dying on the same day of the year as Brigit (Richard Sharpe (ed.), *Medieval Saints' Lives. An Introduction to Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford, 1991), 207, which is an edition of *Vita Quarta* with material not found in *Vita Prima* placed in italics; alternatively, see John Colgan (ed.), *Trias Thaumaturga* (Louvain 1647; facs. repr. Dublin, 1997), 541–2). Darlugdach is not mentioned in either the seventh-century *Vita Secunda* written by Cogitosus (John Colgan (ed.), *Trias Thaumaturga*, 518–26), or *Bethu Brigitte* (Donncha Ó hAodha (ed.), *Bethu Brigitte* (Dublin, 1978)), dated by McCone ('Brigit in the seventh century: a saint with three lives?', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 107–45, at 136) to about 800. Richard Sharpe, 'Vitae S. Brigitae: the oldest texts', *Peritia* 1 (1982) 82–106, at 102, argued that the *Vita Prima* should be dated to the mid-seventh century at the latest, but Kim McCone, 'Brigit', 135–6, would date this text to the mid-eighth century. The continued uncertainty regarding the date of *Vita Prima* means that it is still unclear when Darlugdach was considered to have been successor to Brigit. However, it should be noted that in the first Abernethy note Darlugdach is described as *abbatissa* and seems to have remained in Britain for over a year, which would seemingly contradict the account in the Brigit *Vita Prima* that she died a year to the day after St Brigit. This could indicate that an account different to *Vita Prima* was the basis for the note found in the Pictish king-lists.

⁶³ This was calculated by adding up the reign-lengths of the reconstructed archetype of *Series longior* between these notes: 432+81+4+4 (=521 for foundation of Abernethy) +20+30+12 (or 15) +12 (or 15) +5+7+1+11+1+4+1+8=633, 636, or 639. If Columba's conversion of Bridei (dated to 563) were the starting point, then the foundation of Abernethy would have been in 445, 448, or 451, and the arrival of Patrick in Ireland in 356, 359, or 362. This disagreement was discussed by Chadwick, *Early Scotland*, 9.

⁶⁴ The most suspicious reign in this section is clearly that of Drust son of Uerp, who is given a reign of a hundred years. However, without this long reign-length the foundation of Abernethy would presumably be in the mid-fifth century, which would probably not be contemporaneous with the life of Darlugdach; therefore, at the time when these notes were first calculated it is likely that this source contained the hundred-year reign of Drust son of Uerp.

of an error, as Chadwick proposed, it could have been based on a recalculation made by comparing the king-lists to another text.⁶⁵ This is indicated by the year of joint rule given to Bridei *filius* Maelchon and Galam Cennaleph, which, as with the synchronism with Columba, is only found in *Series longior*. It is unlikely to be coincidence that the extra year and the eight years of the synchronism combine to produce the same synchronism with Bridei's ninth year as in Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History'.⁶⁶ It is possible that, when the note was added to the Pictish king-list, a calculation was made which resulted in the ninth year of Bridei *filius* Maelchon being one year too early (compared to another source). Therefore, while Duncan's theory that the note was the result of an error in an Easter Table is likely to be incorrect, his view that the year of joint rule was added to obtain the same synchronism as in Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History' – that Columba came to Britain in the ninth year of Bridei's reign – is probably right.⁶⁷ The most likely context for such an alteration is when the note was added to the Pictish king-list, rather than taking place in an Easter table, the existence of which is not supported by any evidence.⁶⁸ For this note at least there was probably an attempt to place the event described in the correct year when it was included in the *Series longior* king-list.

The exact year intended for this Columba note is difficult to reconstruct. In the *Series longior* king-list common source, counting from the beginning of the reign of Nechtan son of Der-Ilei in 707, the eighth year of Bridei *filius* Maelchon is either 557, 558, 560, or 561.⁶⁹ These dates are earlier than Bede's 565 or 563, but the common source of the *Series longior* king-lists could have been written in the eleventh century, much later than the inclusion of the synchronism (probably 842/3×876), so there could have been up to two centuries during which reign-lengths could be mis-transcribed. There are significant differences in the reign-lengths compared to *Series breuior* in this

⁶⁵ Chadwick, *Early Scotland*, 14.

⁶⁶ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 8–9.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁸ It is also more probable that a change of one year occurs due to a scribal error in a king-list reign-length, than through the inclusion of an item in an Easter table (presumably from a king-list) in the wrong year.

⁶⁹ For 707 as the year in which Nectan son of Derilei's brother, King Bridei, died, see Evans, *Recording and Re-interpreting History in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (forthcoming). The alternative dates are caused by two factors: uncertainty concerning whether the half year in the reign-length of Gartnait *filius* Donuel would add a year, and uncertainty regarding the reign-length of Gartnait son of Uuid, which is *iiii* in SL1 (Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 248), and *uii* in SL2E (John Lynch, *Cambrensis Eversus*, 93–4, Matthew Kelly (ed. and trans.), *Cambrensis Eversus*, ii. 90). The equivalent king in *Series breuior* (*Nact'an filius Fochle* in MS. I), is given a reign-length of eight years. The calculation in *Series longior* from the eighth year of the reign of Bridei *filius* Maelchon is: 707–22–11–20–19–4 (or 7)–5–12–4–6.5–7–21–4–11 = 560.5 or 557.5. Using the reign-lengths of the other textual group, *Series breuior*, a slightly earlier date is obtained (if the clearly late reign-lengths of Taran *filius* Entifidich (14) and Bridei son of Der-Ilei (31), are emended to the more correct 4 and 11 found in *Series longior*): 707–22–20–21–14–8–5–11–4–6–6–21–4–11 = 554.

section, and the reign-lengths differ from those obtained from the Irish chronicles, especially for kings in the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries, so it is possible that a few scribal mistakes have taken place after the note was included. As a result, it is not possible to decide whether such a note was originally dated to 563, 565 or another year.⁷⁰

Whatever the intended date was, the note indicates the prior existence of a synchronism that Columba converted Bridei in the ninth year of his reign. The genre of the exemplar from which these notes came is not certain, but it is clear that they came from a source in which events were dateable to a specific year in the reign of a Pictish king. This could have been a Pictish king-list, annals or another historical text which contained Pictish kings.⁷¹ The most likely location for its composition is Abernethy, because the note on the foundation of that centre is the only reference to a place in Pictland in the *Series longior* list. It is also possible that the longer account of its foundation, including the bounds of the grant by King Nechtan, was included at the same time and derived from the same source, even though it is only found in one manuscript, *SL1*.⁷² Abernethy, located by the Tay estuary, is likely to have been an important ecclesiastical establishment in Pictland, judging by the Pictish sculpture fragments from there.⁷³

The notes also demonstrate cultural links with Gaelic-speaking regions, since all three display connections with saints derived from or active in Ireland and Dál Riata. In the longer Abernethy note Abbess Darlugdach of Kildare presided over its establishment after Kildare's founding saint, Brigit, interceded with King Nechtan.⁷⁴ As has already been discussed, the statement that Columba converted King Bridei *filius* Maelchon is likely to reflect Pictish views of Columba's missionary activity, rather than the portrayal of Columba in Iona or other Gaelic areas, but nevertheless, it does demonstrate an interest in Columba.

The inclusion of the St Patrick note is more difficult to explain from a Pictish viewpoint. While the note is very brief, the vocabulary employed

⁷⁰ Another possibility is that 707 was not the base date, which could lead to a different result. Calculating in *Series longior* from 858 (the obit of Cinaed son of Alpín in AU 858.2, AI 858.3) produces dates ranging from 544 to 564 for the eighth year of the reign of Bridei *filius* Maelchon.

⁷¹ Chadwick, *Early Scotland*, 14.

⁷² Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 247.

⁷³ Edwina Proudfoot, 'Abernethy and Mugdrum: towards reassessment', in David Henry (ed.), *The Worm, the Germ and the Thorn. Pictish and Related Studies presented to Isabel Henderson* (Balgavies, 1997), 47–63. The territory under its jurisdiction continued to expand later (see G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots. Government, Church and Society from the eleventh to the fourteenth century*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2003), 42; Simon Taylor, 'The coming of the Augustinians to St Andrews and version B of the St Andrews foundation legend', in Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland 500–1297. Essays in honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday* (Dublin, 2000), 115–23, at 119.

⁷⁴ See Simon Taylor, 'The Abernethy foundation account and its place-names', *History Scotland* 5 no.4 (2005) 14–16, at 15, for the identification of the church of St Madoes, located north of the Tay near Abernethy, with St Máedóc, perhaps Máedóc of Ferns, also in Leinster.

closely resembles that found for Patrick's journey to Ireland in some Irish texts concerning St Patrick. The phrase for Patrick's journey to Ireland, using *ad Hiberniam*, 'to Ireland', and *peruenit*, 'he came', is found in the *Additamenta* to the Book of Armagh, a manuscript which was mainly written in 807, in the *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*, both of which derive from a common ancestor in the eighth century, and in an entry in the Annals of Ulster (AU 432.1), which is likely to have been included in the late-eighth or ninth century at a Patrician ecclesiastical centre.⁷⁵ Since these words are common in the period, this correspondence could be viewed as a coincidence, but it is perhaps significant that the two earliest accounts of Patrick's life, Muirchú's 'Life of St Patrick', and Tírechán's *Collectanea*, both dating from the second half of the seventh century, do not contain a remotely similar phrase, whereas from the eighth century onwards *ad Hiberniam* and *peruenit* was used frequently to describe Patrick's journey to Ireland. The consistency of use from texts only in the eighth-century or later indicates that the use of this phrase is unlikely to be chance; instead it demonstrates a common textual tradition. The appearance of the same vocabulary in the same context in the *Series longior* Pictish king-list, therefore, provides evidence for the Pictish use of a text derived from an eighth-century Patrician source. Given the perceived importance of Patrick in the conversion of Ireland, a note on his mission would not be unexpected in a source produced by a Gael, so the evidence of these notes indicates that the community of Abernethy viewed themselves as part of Gaelic ecclesiastical history, and that the Columban *paruchia* was not the only important channel for Gaelic ecclesiastical influence in Pictland.⁷⁶

When these notes were written is not certain, although the note on St Patrick was probably written in the eighth century or later.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ludwig Bieler (ed. and trans. with a contribution by Fergus Kelly), *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh* (Dublin, 1979), 72–6, for the relevant part of Muirchú's 'Life of St Patrick', 126 for Tírechán's *Collectanea*, 166 for the *Additamenta*; and Ludwig Bieler (ed.), *Four Latin Lives of St. Patrick. Colgan's Vita Secunda, Quarta, Tertia, and Quinta* (Dublin, 1971), 79, for *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*. See James Carney, *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), 327–9 for the view that the item on the arrival of Patrick in 432 was a late addition, and for the date-range for its inclusion in the annals and a detailed discussion, see Nicholas Evans, *Recording and Re-interpreting History in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (forthcoming). David N. Dumville, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), 191, gives the dating *ca* 800, at least partly written in 807, for the Book of Armagh; F. J. Byrne and Pádraig Francis, 'Two Lives of Saint Patrick: *Vita Secunda* and *Vita Quarta*', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 124 (1994) 5–117, at 5.

⁷⁶ Patrick was accepted as the most important saint of the Irish by the late seventh century (see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), 426).

⁷⁷ The place-names in the second note on Abernethy in *SL1*, Anderson (ed.), *Kings*, 247, 262, which probably were included at the same time contain both Brittonic (often Gaelicised) and Gaelic linguistic elements. See Watson, *The History*, 211 for *Aburnethige*, and Taylor, 'The Abernethy foundation account', 15–16, for identifications and discussion of places in the boundary clause, suggesting that the account is unlikely to be much earlier than the ninth century because of the dates of the Carpow cross-slab or the Mugdrum cross. A linguistic context where the writer

It is possible that the synchronism for Columba's conversion of Bridei was an interpretation derived from Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History', but this would still not explain how Bede obtained his calculation for St Columba. Given that it is likely that a Pictish king-list was in existence by the 660s, as Molly Miller suggested, it is probable that there were Pictish texts which linked Columba's arrival to Pictish royal history by the time that Bede was writing, since the Iona confederacy founded a number of establishments in Pictland.⁷⁸ This would entail a text which had kings as far back as the reign of Bridei *filius* Maelchon at least, but it is unclear whether this was a king-list, a chronicle, chronological memoranda like those in the Moore manuscript of Bede's 'Ecclesiastical History', or notes made to Easter tables, although the importance of such tables as sources for later historical texts has rightly been downplayed by recent scholars.⁷⁹

One such text, if not an ancestor of the notes preserved in the *Series longior* king-lists, provided the information, ultimately partially derived from Iona sources, for Bede's synchronism. By counting the reign-lengths or years from the early eighth century back to this note Bede

⁷⁷ (*Continued*) is a Gaelic speaker and/or at least some people in the area around Abernethy were speaking Gaelic instead of Pictish would seem to fit the evidence best.

⁷⁸ However, the appearance of a synchronism similar to Bede's in a text from Abernethy, an establishment not associated with Iona, makes it possible that Bede's source was not written in a Columban monastery in Pictland. Since Columba had become viewed as an apostle of the Picts by Bede's time, the date of Bridei's conversion would have been of interest in other monasteries in Pictland, so the initial calculation could have been made or transferred into a manuscript produced in a non-Columban monastery. As Dauvit Broun has suggested to me, in the case of Abernethy the relative chronological positions of the Columba and Abernethy notes would also have served to emphasise that Abernethy was the older establishment.

⁷⁹ Peter Hunter Blair, 'The Moore Memoranda on Northumbrian history', in Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (eds), *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe, H. M. Chadwick Memorial Studies* (Cambridge, 1950), 245–57. It was assumed by scholars (for example, Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles*, 31–8) that annals were largely constructed from Easter tables, and that historical writers, such as Bede, frequently drew on notes in Easter tables for their dated events. However, as Kenneth Harrison argued (*The Framework*, 44–50), Late-Antique chronicles, including those of Eusebius, Prosper, and Jerome among others, also provided a model for early medieval writers, so contemporary events could have been included in sets of annals, rather than positing that events were first written in Easter tables then transferred into annals. The low number of early surviving Easter tables containing notices of events from Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent has also been highlighted by Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), 97–9. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín ('Early Irish annals from Easter tables: a case restated', *Peritia* 2 (1983) 74–86) has provided an example where an Easter table includes an Irish event, and cases where synchronisms are made to events in the seventh century, but this does not prove that Easter tables were major sources for chronicles or histories. It is in fact possible that events in Easter tables could be included from chronicles; one later instance is Glasgow, Glasgow University, MS Hunterian 85 (T.42), which contains an Easter table written by Symeon of Durham in the early twelfth century, to which Symeon added notes taken from a chronicle (as has been pointed out to me by Dauvit Broun; see Michael Gullick, 'The hand of Symeon of Durham: further observations on the Durham Martyrology scribe', in David Rollason (ed.), *Symeon of Durham: Historian of Durham and the North* (Stamford, 1998), 14–31, at 17–18, 29, and J. E. Story, 'Symeon as annalist' in *ibid.*, 202–13, at 207–8).

(or less likely his source) would probably have been able to calculate the exact date of 565 for Columba's arrival in Britain.⁸⁰ The fixed point for the calculation could have been the end or beginning of the reign of a Pictish king the date of which Bede thought he knew.⁸¹ From 565 he would then have created the synchronism that Easter was celebrated using the incorrect reckoning for 150 years, since he knew that Iona began to use the Dionysiac calendar in 716.⁸² It would therefore seem to be an instance where Bede had information from a Pictish source which he used for the date of Columba's arrival. He then amplified the importance of this event by the creation of further calculations derived from other information on Columba, from his knowledge of when Iona changed its Easter reckoning, and his source for Imperial reigns. The calculation of Columba's arrival in Britain, therefore, provides further evidence that Bede perceived Columba's arrival to have been a pivotal moment in ecclesiastical history.⁸³ That Bede was willing to rely on a Pictish source as the basis for this indicates that he held a relatively high regard for Pictish scholarship, which itself adapted Gaelic ideas for Pictish purposes.

APPENDIX:

A Note on Ecgberht, the Picts, and the Change of Easter Reckoning at Iona

For Bede, Columba's arrival in Britain was probably important as the start of the cyclical process whereby Northumbria was converted from Iona through Aedán's mission, which was reciprocated when Ecgberht convinced Iona to change its Easter reckoning in 716; therefore, according to this interpretation, Iona was rewarded for its own missionary activity.⁸⁴ Circumstantial evidence could support the

⁸⁰ That he would have been willing to do this without questioning its reliability is indicated by his use of the Northumbrian king-list to date the beginning of King Ida's reign to A.D. 547 (Bede, *HE*, v.24, Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 562).

⁸¹ The date 565 could have been obtained if Bede's base event were two years earlier than Bede thought or if the total of the Pictish royal reigns indicated that date.

⁸² Unless the Pictish source were written in a monastery in the Iona confederacy, it seems unlikely that the conversion of Iona to the Dionysiac Easter reckoning would have been recorded in Bede's Pictish source, since the Pictish kingdom had changed its own Easter reckoning beforehand (as indicated in Bede, *HE*, v.21, v.22, Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 552–3).

⁸³ See the Appendix for more on its importance to Bede, and possibly for the Picts.

⁸⁴ See Bede, *HE*, v.22 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 554–5), for words to this effect.

possibility that some of the Picts perceived their own situation in similar terms; that Columba had converted the Picts, and in return the Picts under King Nechtan had pressurised Iona to change how it calculated Easter. Duncan could have been broadly correct in arguing that Ecgberht had a Pictish connection, although the meaning of the statement in Bede *HE* iii.27 that Ecgberht was exiled among the Picts and Irish, does not necessarily indicate that he went to the Picts.⁸⁵ It could reflect the close association Bede made elsewhere between Iona and the Picts; for instance in *HE* v.9 Bede follows his statement that it was God's will that Ecgberht should give instruction to the monasteries of Columba by explaining that Columba was the first teacher of Christianity to the northern Picts, and that he was long honoured by the Scots and Picts, as well as being the founder of Iona.⁸⁶ It is possible that Ecgberht went to the Picts, but this would probably have broken the oath made by Ecgberht that he would never return to the island of Britain from Ireland. Staying on Iona may have been considered acceptable and could have allowed him to persuade the Iona community as well as the heads of other Columban monasteries visiting there; this would probably have involved meeting both Picts and Gaels.⁸⁷

However, the connection between Ecgberht and the Picts may have also been less direct; a possible interpretation of some aspects of the ecclesiastical reforms of the 710s could be that King Nechtan, wanting to change the form of tonsure and Easter reckoning among the Picts and the Iona community in order to enhance his authority, asked for assistance from Northumbria. Abbot Ceolfrith then sent the letter to Nechtan with arguments in favour of the changes. A possible hint in favour of the existence of these Pictish aspirations is an abrupt transition in subject matter in Ceolfrith's letter to Nechtan, noticed by Duncan.⁸⁸ This letter immediately moves from a discussion of Adomnán's failed attempt, because of his lack of influence, to convert Iona to orthodoxy, to an exhortation to King Nechtan to keep correct observances with the people whom God has set him to rule. The development of this passage may be more understandable by arguing that the text contained an inherent suggestion that Iona could in some way be regarded as part of Nechtan's realm; if Nechtan could use his influence over Iona, to succeed where Adomnán failed, then this would prove that Iona and possibly Dál Riata was given to Nechtan by God. It could then have been argued that, as with the Anglo-Saxons and Ecgberht's role in the same

⁸⁵ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona and the Picts', 23, 25–7, 31, 33–6; Bede, *HE*, iii.27 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 314–15).

⁸⁶ Bede, *HE*, v.9 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 476–9).

⁸⁷ Bede, *HE*, iii.27 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 312–13).

⁸⁸ Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 21–2; Bede, *HE*, v.21 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 550–1).

events, the ecclesiastical debt owed by the Picts to Iona for its missionary activity in Pictland had been repaid. Such an interpretation is plausible but speculative, and could be an over-interpretation, since the account of Adomnán's failure could have been included simply because he was a respected and influential ecclesiastic in Pictland.

While hints of Pictish claims to overlordship may have influenced Nechtan's decision to change Easter tables in his kingdom, they would probably have been viewed less positively in Iona and Dál Riata. Ceolfrith may, therefore, have also contacted Ecgbert in Ireland explaining the situation. Ecgbert, as someone residing in the Gaelic world since the 660s, could have been viewed in Iona as more neutral than the Picts, and as an old, holy monk and bishop, could have been able to persuade Iona and other Columban communities to change their practices without seeming to accede to Pictish pressure and any associated political claims regarding Iona and Dál Riata.⁸⁹ In favour of this theory is that it is unlikely to have been a coincidence that Ecgbert went to Iona on his mission soon after the Picts changed their Easter calculation, and it might explain why the Picts expelled the Iona *familia* in 717; if Iona still did not accept Pictish claims to supremacy, Nechtan perhaps used the unresolved issue of the tonsure as an excuse to put pressure on Iona. This may have been more successful since in 718 Iona accepted the coronal tonsure.⁹⁰ It is therefore possible that political claims of the Picts in Dál Riata were a factor in stimulating religious change in both Dál Riata and Pictland, although the role of Ecgbert and the delay in changing the tonsure indicate that theological issues were also crucial.

⁸⁹ On Ecgbert's background, see Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 22–3.

⁹⁰ AU 717.4, AT kl 217.3, CS 713.2; AT kl 218.6 and CS 714.3. According to Bede, *HE* v.9 (Colgrave and Mynors (eds and trans.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 476–9), Ecgbert had been informed via a vision of Boisil, prior of Melrose, to another member of his community that God wanted him to instruct the Columban monasteries. Since this event is placed chronologically before the mission of Willibrord in the 690s, the implication is that Ecgbert may have waited for another twenty years, when he was in his mid seventies, before going to Iona (see Duncan, 'Bede, Iona, and the Picts', 22), so the timing of his mission is likely to be linked to the change in Pictish Easter reckoning.